



INTERSTATE DRIVING

10

Interstate Highway Driving Is Different!

Traffic on Interstates usually moves more safely and efficiently because access is controlled. There are no stop signs, no railroad crossings and no traffic lights. Interstates usually have few steep hills or sharp curves to limit your view of the road ahead. Limited access or controlled access means that you enter or leave the roadway only at entrances and exits, called interchanges, without ever crossing the path of other traffic. Interstates and divided highways have largely removed the chance of head-on collisions but driving on our Interstates is very different.

Interstates, require good driving skills and habits for you to safely get where you are going. Safe use of the Interstates demands a complete awareness of a higher speed type of driving and constant alertness by the driver.

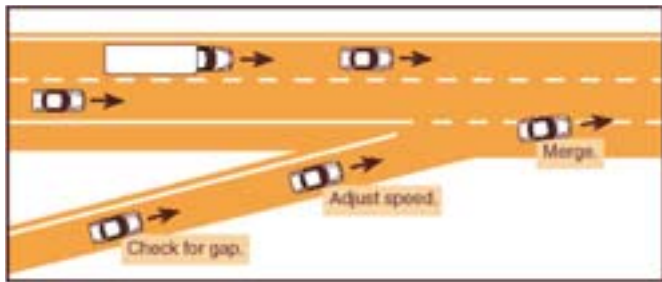
Before Driving on the Interstate

Plan your trip in advance so that you know your entrance, direction, and exit. Make sure that you and your car are in good condition. Check your gas gauge before getting on the Interstate. In rural areas it may be many miles between exits and you could risk running out of gas before getting to a location where you could refuel. If you cannot or do not wish to drive at or above the minimum speed limit, do not use the Interstate.

Entering the Interstate

In most driving situations, you slow down or stop before you enter a busy road, but when entering an Interstate you do the opposite. You must use the merging or acceleration lane to speed up and merge with fast-moving traffic already on the Interstate.

Good judgment and good timing are necessary to merge smoothly with the fast-moving traffic. Upon entering the Interstate on-ramp, stay to the right and increase your speed in the acceleration lane/entrance ramp. Use the ramp to reach Interstate speed in order to allow your car to merge into the travel lane when the way is clear. Be sure to give the proper left turn signal to indicate your need to enter the traffic lane. Drivers already on the Interstate should, for their own safety, make allowance for those vehicles attempting to enter. However it is your responsibility to yield the right-of-way to other cars on the Interstate.



Unnecessary stopping on Interstate on-ramps causes many rear-end collisions and also obstructs the even flow of traffic. Do not drive to the end of the ramp and stop or you

will not have enough room to get up to the speed of the Interstate traffic. Drivers behind you will not expect you to stop and if they are watching the traffic on the main road for their space to merge you could easily be hit from the rear. If you have to wait for space to enter an Interstate, slow down on the ramp so that you will still have some room to speed up before you have to merge. Heavy traffic conditions sometimes create a “slowdown” at an entrance ramp, but unless it is absolutely unavoidable, it is best to keep your vehicle moving at least at some slow pace.



LANE ADDED



MERGING TRAFFIC

Do you know what the difference in the two signs above is? Both appear to be telling you that traffic is coming into the main road from the right. However there is an IMPORTANT difference.

- The “lane added” sign means that there is a new right lane added to the Interstate/roadway for the incoming traffic. The on-ramp becomes a new lane and the entering traffic does not need to merge immediately. Traffic on the Interstate should avoid making lane changes to the right at this location as the entering traffic will not be expecting vehicles to move into their travel path.
- The regular ‘merge’ sign means that the traffic coming from the right is going to need to merge into the existing right hand traffic lane and drivers on the Interstate should be aware and cautious of this incoming traffic.

Driving on the Interstate

Interstates usually have several lanes of traffic traveling in the same direction. On these roads, you should leave the extreme left lane for faster traffic. If you drive at an even speed, you will have less need to change lanes. Remember, lane-hopping any time is dangerous, annoys other drivers, increases the risk of a collision, often contributes to “road rage” and very seldom saves the driver any significant amount of travel time.

Keep your vehicle in the middle of your traffic lane. You may change lanes when necessary, but don’t weave in and out of traffic. Do not travel alongside other vehicles at the same speed or you risk being in the other driver’s blind spots. Change speed and/or lanes to avoid these situations. Avoid cars moving in packs and keep a safe space cushion around your vehicle for emergency maneuvers. If you are going to exit the Interstate move to the right lane as early as possible to avoid hasty lane changes which could result in a dangerous situation or traffic accident.

Stay at least 2-seconds behind vehicles in front of you and increase this space to a minimum of 4-seconds in bad weather, night driving and on higher speed rural sections of the Interstate. Scan the roadway ahead, try to watch 15-20 seconds in front of your vehicle for cars braking, entering or exiting. There are times, especially in major cities, when Interstates get jammed by heavy traffic or tie-ups caused by collisions during rush hour traffic. Be alert for any hint that traffic on the Interstate ahead is not moving at a normal pace. Otherwise, you might have to slam on your brakes to avoid a rear-end crash with the vehicle ahead. If you spot a tie-up that will cause you to slow down or stop, lightly tap your brake pedal several times to alert drivers behind you.



“Traffic Flow” and Speed Control on the Interstate

Speeds traveled on rural Interstates are higher than on other roads. There also are fewer stop-and-go situations. Try to keep pace with traffic on the road, but **don’t be lured into exceeding the posted speed to “stay with the flow of the traffic”**.

Do maintain a constant speed and keep a safe pace with other traffic. Do not speed up and slow down unnecessarily. Drive between the minimum (45 M.P.H.) and the maximum (55-70 M.P.H.) speed limits. Driving too slowly is against the law because it’s dangerous. A slowpoke on an Interstate can be just as reckless as a speeder. Remember, if you drive at a speed below the flow of traffic, you must use the right lane and if the minimum speed is too high for your comfort you should use a different roadway.

If you are traveling in the left lane and someone comes up behind you at a faster speed, move one lane to your right. Do not tie up traffic in the left lane. Courteous and safe driving practices require that drivers in any lane, except the right lane used for slower traffic, should be prepared to move to another lane to allow faster traffic to pass.

By the same token these practices teach that drivers in the right lane should adjust their speed to allow others to enter the Interstate safely. Be alert to merging traffic signs. When it is safe to do so, you should either slow down or move to another lane to allow space for on-ramp traffic to merge safely. Remember, trucks and buses entering the Interstate may need extra time to adjust to traffic patterns. Be cooperative and give them extra time and space to adjust to the traffic flow.

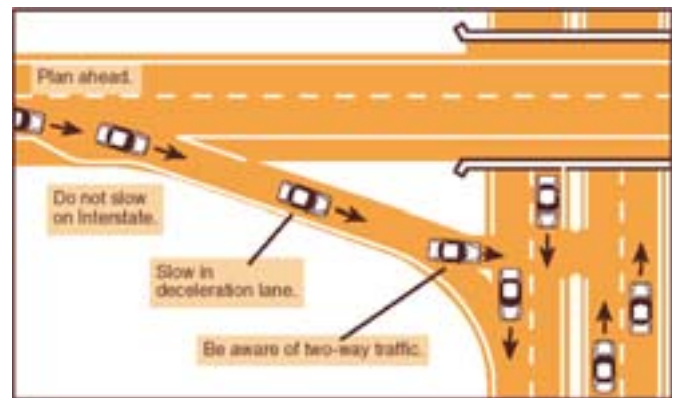
Leaving the Interstate

Interchanges may be different and it is important to watch for advance directional signs. Choose the right exit, and be sure you are in the proper lane well before you turn off the Interstate. The heavier the traffic the earlier you should move into the proper lane. Exit signs are usually placed at least one (1) mile ahead of the exit turn-off.

To leave the Interstate, signal your intention to change lanes, and move to the lane nearest the exit/off-ramp. Maintain your speed until you enter the deceleration lane, which is usually outlined by a series of amber reflectors, and reduce speed to the exit ramp posted speed. Speed should be reduced further on the exit ramp. You should have your vehicle slowed to the posted limit for the roadway you are exiting onto.

The paved shoulder of the Interstate should not be used for vehicular travel except for deceleration when marked for this purpose or for emergency purposes.

Remember, it is illegal to back up or make a U-turn on Interstate highways. If you miss your exit you must proceed to the next exit.

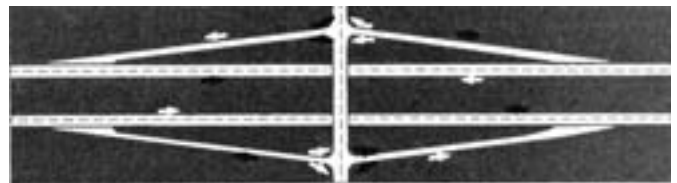


Interchanges

It is also very important to know how to maneuver on the different types of interchanges. Two common types of interchanges are the DIAMOND and the CLOVERLEAF, which are diagrammed and explained below. There are various other types of interchanges and methods of turning may vary from one to the other. When approaching any type of interchange, heed signs that will tell you how to make the turn you want to make.

Diamond Interchange

Traffic using the interstate may gain access to the intersecting roadway by taking the signed exit ramp, proceeding to the cross roadway and obeying the traffic sign or signal at the intersection. Turns may then be made to the right or left as at any ordinary intersection.



DIAMOND INTERCHANGE

With a diamond interchange, the proper exit ramp will always be encountered before passing over or under the intersecting roadway.

Traffic using the cross roadway may enter the interstate by making either a left or right turn onto the appropriate entrance ramp. THE RIGHT TURN entrance ramp will

always be encountered BEFORE crossing over or under the interstate. The LEFT TURN entrance ramp will always be encountered AFTER crossing over or under the interstate.

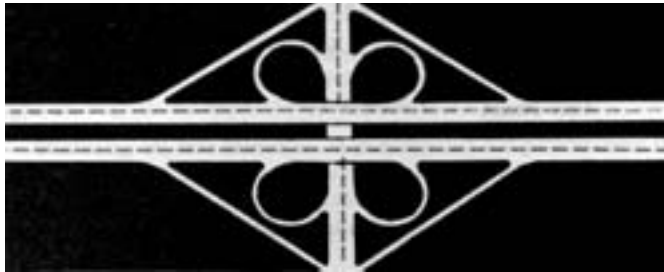
NEVER MAKE A RIGHT TURN onto a ramp AFTER crossing the interstate lanes.

NEVER MAKE A LEFT TURN onto a ramp BEFORE crossing the interstate lanes.

Cloverleaf Interchange

At a cloverleaf interchange, all turns are right turns.

TO TURN RIGHT...You take the right turn before you get to the overpass.



CLOVERLEAF INTERCHANGE

TO TURN LEFT...You take the right turn just after the overpass. The road will carry you around to join the crossroad and you will be going in the same direction as if you had turned left at an ordinary intersection. The advantage of such an interchange is that you do not have to cross the path of traffic to make a turn.

“Weaving” Interchange

One of the most hazardous lane management situations occurs when Interstate traffic is both exiting and entering at the same area. This weaving of vehicles trying to get on or off the highway at the same time requires the complete attention of all drivers and quick reactions for a safe maneuver. A weaving section takes maximum cooperation. It can't work without sharing and sensible, courteous social interaction on the part of every driver. Signs and lane markings do their part. Safe drivers have to do the rest.

You should follow the routine procedures for entering the Interstate as those used at normal on-ramps, however you must be aware that vehicles already on the Interstate may be moving right to enter the exit ramp. This will require both you and the other driver to yield and share the interchange in a equal “give and take” manner. If drivers aren't paying proper attention to the directional signs and lane design this movement of exiting traffic can create the potential for a serious accident. You must use extreme caution when utilizing these type of interchanges.

Fight Interstate Hypnosis

Continuous Interstate driving can become monotonous. A condition of drowsiness or unawareness can be brought about by reduced activity and steady sounds of wind, engine, and tire hum. This is known as Interstate hypnosis. **All drivers should be aware of its danger and of the methods for fighting it.** Use the following tips to help you recognize and avoid this condition:

- **Keep shifting your eyes.** When driving, look well ahead but avoid staring. Get into the habit of shifting your eyes left and right and of checking your rearview mirror. If you sit and stare straight ahead, you can almost put yourself to sleep.
- **Quit driving when you are drowsy.** Drowsiness is the first step in falling asleep.
- **Keep your car's interior as cool as possible.**
- **As a further protection, stop and refresh yourself at regular intervals.** Take a break and get out of the car at least every 2 hours or every 100 miles or so. Even if you are feeling well you should stop, get out of your car and walk around, allow your muscles to relax.
- It is safest for yourself and others if you **do not drive more than 8 hours per day.**

Special Interstate Driving Instructions

1. On the Interstate, you may **NOT**:
 - Drive over or across any dividing section or separation (only emergency vehicles and highway maintenance crews may cross an Interstate median legally).
 - Make a left turn or a U-turn except through an opening provided and marked for such turns.
 - Change lanes without signaling.
 - Drive in the blind spot of other drivers. Traveling in a position where the driver ahead of you cannot see your vehicle can be dangerous. Either stay behind or go around. Do NOT follow to the side.
 - Drive onto the Interstate except through an opening provided for such entrance.
 - Park or stop on the Interstate except at areas especially provided. Parking on the shoulder of the Interstate is prohibited except in cases of emergency.
 - Back up if you miss an exit - You must go to the next exit.
2. Always remember these tips for safe Interstate driving:
 - Drive in a dependable and predictable manner
 - Be a safe and courteous driver.
 - Always signal your intentions well in advance.
 - Keep you attention constantly on your driving.
 - Make frequent traffic checks by looking in your rearview and side-view mirrors often.
 - Keep a safe following distance between your car and the vehicle you are following.
 - Check instruments often for speed and fuel supply.
 - Keep pace with traffic but don't speed illegally just because other drivers are speeding.
 - Stay in the right lane if traveling slower than the other traffic.
 - Be alert to merging traffic signs and vehicles entering the Interstate.
 - When safe to do so, move to another lane to allow on-ramp traffic to enter the Interstate.

3. Special situations to be aware of include:

- **Be prepared for the unexpected!** - When driving on an Interstate highway, look out for pedestrians who may have had a vehicle breakdown, or animals that may be on the roadway. It is not an impossibility for vehicles to be traveling in the wrong direction on an Interstate!
- **Lane Wandering** - Weaving and wandering are dangerous. Keep to the right unless overtaking or passing. Watch mirrors, and signal before changing lanes. Don't cut back until it is safe. Stay aware of surrounding traffic conditions.
- **Maintain Safe Distance** - Following too closely is the cause of many multiple-car collisions. Higher Interstate speeds increase danger, and require greater distances between cars.
- **Night Driving** - Darkness increases driving dangers. On the basis of mileage driven, night driving is far more dangerous than day driving. Fatigue and sharply reduced vision are primarily responsible for this greater danger. It is also true that drinking drivers are more likely to be on the road at night.

Dynamic Message Signs



Dynamic Message Signs are being installed along Tennessee interstates in urban areas to provide traffic information to motorists. These signs advise motorists of traffic incidents or

construction ahead so they can consider alternate routes.

Only real-time information about incidents, traffic, roadwork, weather or pavement conditions that could have an effect on driver safety and traffic flow shall be displayed on the DMS. Exceptions to this are messages that may occasionally be displayed:

- advance notification of roadwork requiring lane closures
- advance notification of special events that will adversely affect travel either because of added traffic generated or the requirement to close streets or highways.

Occasional messages associated with Amber Alerts or other Public Safety issues are also displayed. Otherwise, signs will be blank. For more information visit: www.tdot.state.tn.us



Dealing with Traffic Congestion

Chronic traffic congestion is fast becoming the Tennessee commuter's biggest headache, but even small changes in driving habits could provide fast relief. Several driving behaviors that contribute to traffic congestion include:

- **Rubbernecking** - perhaps the most frustrating of behaviors. Slowing down to look at accidents or virtually anything else out of the ordinary, is one of the worst congestion offenders.
- **Tailgating** - following too closely is common on Tennessee interstates, accounting for innumerable accidents which in turn clog major routes often for hours.
- **Unnecessary Lane Changes** - although it produces virtually NO improvement in arrival or travel times, many motorists insist on weaving in and out of interstate lanes dangerously, which at best slows down all traffic and at worst causes many accidents.
- **Inattention** - drivers can commonly be seen eating, grooming in the rearview mirror, talking on a cellular telephone, and even reading the newspaper as they drive to work.

Drivers who do not watch the fuel gauge or maintain their vehicles properly can also cause traffic congestion. These vehicles can malfunction or stall on the interstate or other streets causing bottlenecks and major slow downs in traffic flow.

If you will learn to avoid these "bad behaviors" and keep them from becoming your average driving habits, you will go along way toward helping to keep traffic congestion under control in Tennessee.

Vehicle Breakdowns, Accidents and Emergency Stopping on Interstate Highways

If you have vehicle trouble, move to the right shoulder or emergency stopping area as soon as you can. Turn on your emergency flashers to warn other traffic. If you need help, raise your hood and tie a white cloth to the hood or radio antenna. If possible, it is better to stay in or near your vehicle on the side away from traffic. Walking along the Interstate is dangerous. Keep children away from traffic.

If you stay with your vehicle, a police patrol will stop to help you when they come by if they are not on another call. If you are within one of the major metropolitan areas of Tennessee (Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga or Knoxville) you may also receive assistance from one of the Tennessee Department of Transportation's Incident Response Units (HELP Truck). These units patrol specific routes on the major Interstates in these cities. The HELP operators have the authority to "remove or cause



to be removed” any vehicle that is an “obstruction or hazard to traffic”. The HELP operators are trained to deal with incident scenes, and you should always follow their instructions same as those of other police or traffic control personnel. (You can find more information on the HELP program at the TDOT website: www.tdot.state.tn.us)

Move It For Safety

If you are involved in a traffic accident on the Interstate, Tennessee law now allows you to move the vehicle to help prevent blocking the traffic flow. If the vehicle is still driveable and there are NO SERIOUS PERSONAL INJURIES or deaths you may pull the vehicle(s) to the emergency lane and await the arrival of a trooper or police officer to the accident scene. Never attempt to move a seriously injured accident victim unless directed to do so by the proper emergency personnel. Also never disturb an accident scene in any manner when a fatality is involved. Under Tennessee law you must not leave the scene of any type of crash, but, while remaining at the scene, you should not “unnecessarily block traffic”.



The Tennessee Department of Transportation has placed signs along the state's interstate system reminding motorists to move their damaged vehicles to the shoulder if no serious injury has occurred.

***THP** - In the event of a highway emergency, your free cellular phone call connects you directly to a Tennessee Highway Patrol Dispatcher for assistance. Simply dial:

***-T-H-P** (or *847)

Interstate Travel Tips

Plan your trip in advance. Use a map and decide exactly where to get on and off the interstate.

Check your car's gasoline gauge and get fuel if you do not have enough for your trip. Also check for water and oil needs. Higher speeds generate more heat. Because there are no service stations located directly on Interstates, you are in serious trouble if you run out of gasoline or have a breakdown.

Make sure your car is in good mechanical condition; that your tires, including spare, are properly inflated, have good treads and are free of breaks.

If you have car trouble, pull completely off the traveled portion of the road. Be especially cautious at night since there

is a danger of being hit from the rear.

To signal for assistance on the Interstate, tie a white handkerchief or scarf to the left door handle or radio antennae or raise the hood of the car. To signal after dark, turn on your inside dome light and/or set out flares or portable warning signals. Wait for help. Do not walk along the Interstate.

Suggested Safety and Emergency Equipment

Often, we don't think about what we need in traveling situations until we encounter an emergency. In case of a flat tire, vehicle breakdown or other roadside emergency on any road, you should have the following items in your car:

- Spare tire in excellent condition (be sure to have it checked each time you have your tires rotated).
- Jack and tire iron
- Tire Pressure Gauge
- Can of sealant for small leaks in tire(s)
- Flash light, portable radio and spare batteries
- Car Owner's Manual
- Insurance information and car registration
- Paper, pen or pencil
- Three fuses or reflectors for night-time emergencies.
- First Aid Kit
- Fire Extinguisher
- Jumper cables
- Spare bottle of windshield washer fluid.
- Empty gas can and an unopened can of motor oil
- Toolbox with screwdrivers, wrenches, small hammer, scissors, duct tape, etc.
- Bottled water and some simple non-perishable snack foods. (water is especially prudent to carry when traveling during hot summer weather)
- Emergency phone numbers of family, friends and auto club or insurance agent.
- Cellular phone
- During winter travel also carry:
 - a blanket,
 - small portable heater.
 - window scraper for iced over windows.,
 - snow tires or tire chains

